

NETWORK NEWS

FOR OWNERS AND MANAGERS OF HUD INSURED AND ASSISTED HOUSING

DELIVERING TECHNOLOGY ACCESS TO AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES

IN THIS ISSUE

<i>Owners Serve Resident Needs, Fulfill Mission Through Neighborhood Networks</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>How Successful Consortia Thrive and Grow</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Getting the Best START</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Good Planning Can Promote Sustainability</i>	<i>9</i>

2004 Issue 4

Owners Serve Resident Needs, Fulfill Mission Through Neighborhood Networks

In rural communities and urban areas across the country, owners and managers of HUD insured and assisted properties are working to help residents on their journey to self-sufficiency and, in many cases, to fulfill their own organization's mission. The reasons for starting a Neighborhood Networks center are as varied as the number of problems that residents face in their daily lives, but all centers share one central mission: connecting families to computer technology and training to help them improve their economic status.

In central Kentucky and Indiana, New Directions Housing Corporation (NDHC) works to provide families with the tools, information, and resources necessary to succeed in life. "Our mission is not only to provide a place to live, but also to give people a sense of place," states Joe Gliessner, executive director of NDHC, which evolved 32 years ago from an inner-city ministry program. In 1995 NDHC's service coordinator attended a HUD Neighborhood Networks conference in Washington, D.C., and returned home inspired to participate in the emerging initiative.

"Our executive director at that time understood the importance of providing technology access to adults, seniors, and youth, and realized how the development of learning centers helps NDHC achieve its founding mission," Gliessner adds.

Since opening its first learning center in 1997, NDHC has expanded the number of housing developments it manages, and it tries to include Neighborhood Networks centers at all properties that need them. NDHC currently has four operational Neighborhood Networks centers serving its residents and the surrounding community. "Often we find the available space during renovations of our properties. It might stem from the conversion of a residential unit or large storage space into a computer or learning center," states Gliessner. "We have learned to utilize the resources we have to create amenities for the residents."



NDHC uses a mix of financial tools and partnerships to leverage resources to build and operate its Neighborhood Networks centers. For example, NDHC has used the Mark-to-Market refinancing mechanism to help pay for construction and to provide some staff funding. “To open and operate the centers, we look at what HUD is providing and then we work with our partners to leverage what is available into greater funding opportunities,” states Gliessner. “We work with local service providers to explore common goals and establish programs that complement and work with each other.”

NDHC works with a large group of partners whose makeup varies depending on a center’s location. In one community, for example, NDHC built on its partnership with the United Way to secure funding for center staff. Awards from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and other organizations have funded activities at some centers.

Resident Benefits

Gliessner highlights some key benefits that Neighborhood Networks centers have provided:

- Some children have better access to computers at local Neighborhood Networks centers than they do at their schools;
- As a result of tax preparation assistance at the O’Connor Center in Louisville, Kentucky, NDHC helped 76 families take advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit, sending \$122,000 in refunds back into the community; and
- Whenever possible, NDHC hires residents to help staff Neighborhood Networks centers, providing many adults with needed first-job experience.

Owner Benefits


Although the nonprofit organization does have years of experience delivering community services, NDHC had to develop new skills when it decided to own and manage affordable housing properties. Onsite Neighborhood Networks centers have helped NDHC manage those properties, according to Gliessner. “By building a sense of community, the center helps create a safer environment. There is no need for a ‘block-watch’ attitude,” he continues. “The centers also improve resident attitudes toward management. We have periodic potluck lunches where residents, maintenance staff, and management all get together.”

The development and operation of a Neighborhood Networks center benefits more people than just the residents that the facility serves. Some property owners cite a reduction in vandalism and



Consortia must provide services to their members or the members won't see the need to stay involved.

*Sarah Richey,
Alabama Neighborhood
Networks Coordinator*

the development of a close-knit neighborhood where residents and managers look out for each other's interests. Building and operating centers helps an organization fulfill its broader mission to serve residents and help them move toward self-sufficiency. The reasons for opening a center are unique to each property owner, and resident needs vary. This is why the Neighborhood Networks Initiative is flexible and adaptable to a variety of situations and can be tailored to the specific characteristics—urban or rural, small or large—of a community. 

How Successful Consortia Thrive and Grow

“Consortia must provide services to their members or the members won't see the need to stay involved,” says Sarah Richey, Alabama Neighborhood Networks Coordinator. Of equal importance, successful consortia must communicate regularly with their members and encourage networking.

Providing Services to Centers

Successful consortia provide services and benefits to Neighborhood Networks centers, such as:

- **Nonprofit status.** “Obtaining IRS 501(c)(3) status is important for consortia because many federal and local grants are limited to nonprofit applicants,” says Barb Bickham, Ohio Neighborhood Networks Coordinator. Centers without 501(c)(3) nonprofit status can acquire it through membership in a registered nonprofit consortium.

For example, Digital Promise, a 501(c)(3) Neighborhood Networks consortium in Washington State, received more than \$40,000 from Seattle's Technology Matching Grant program and distributed the proceeds to several fledgling computer learning centers in the city.

- **Resources.** Viable consortia help members secure needed services and resources including office staff, instructors, volunteers, fundraising assistance, technical assistance, hardware, and software.

“The Alabama Neighborhood Networks Consortium obtained a Tech Foundation award that gave member centers access to the foundation's software library for a year,” says Richey.

Helping provide staff members, such as instructors, technology experts, and grantwriters for member centers is another valuable service consortia can provide. The Alabama Neighborhood Networks Consortium (ANNC) and Digital Promise arranged for AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers to staff consortia offices and assist centers with their programs. In 2003 ANNC's two VISTA volunteers helped coordinate center activities throughout Alabama and also worked on fundraising. Various VISTA volunteers have provided 5 consecutive years of service and helped Digital Promise grow into a stable organization.

Digital Promise's Web site offers many services to its members:

- A hardware/software clearinghouse providing donated new and used computers, monitors, printers, and software;
- Free or discounted services, such as Internet connections, phone lines, and technical support;
- Fundraising assistance, including information on fundraising options and assessments of a center's fundraising strengths and weaknesses;
- Grantwriting services and information on where to apply for grants that match a center's needs;
- Technical assistance, including equipment and staff training, and curriculum development; and
- Volunteer support staff, including teachers, managers, and technology experts.



Providing Benefits to Community Partners

Maintaining current partnerships and developing new local partners is also important to consortia longevity. A key strategy in attracting local partners is to emphasize that Neighborhood Networks centers serve the same populations as those targeted by colleges, public agencies, and nonprofit groups.

- **Access to Neighborhood Networks staff, families, and centers.** Through membership in consortia, colleges, public agencies, and nonprofit groups are able to meet and network with directors of Neighborhood Networks centers and explore opportunities for providing services at area centers. For example, public school officials can try to develop closer cooperation between neighborhood schools and center families for tutoring and enrichment activities, colleges can explore opportunities at Neighborhood Networks centers for students who are interested in community

This collaboration benefited both the college and the residents.

service activities (for example, mentoring or tutoring), and public health departments can discuss available services (for example, blood pressure screening or nutrition classes) at a consortium meeting.

- **Grant collaborations.** Frequently, local partners (such as colleges and other nonprofits) are interested in applying for grants targeting the same populations as those served by Neighborhood Networks centers. By giving local partners access to Neighborhood Networks families, consortium membership can help agencies meet eligibility requirements for many local and federal grants.

HUD's Office of University Partnerships (OUP), for example, provides grants to colleges and universities to collaborate with community partners on initiatives to revitalize low-income neighborhoods by providing public service projects, instructional programs, and many other activities. Neighborhood Networks consortia can collaborate with a local college or university on an OUP application to provide computer equipment, computer and literacy classes, and afterschool programs at area Neighborhood Networks centers.

"Columbus State Community College wanted to apply for a grant to teach English-as-a-second-language classes and computer skills to low-income families," says Bickham. "Our consortium was able to link the college with a Columbus Neighborhood Networks center, where college instructors would give ESL and computer classes." This collaboration benefited both the college and the residents: the college needed low-income clients in order to be eligible for the grant, and families were able to enroll in onsite classes taught by college instructors. According to Bickham, many residents reported that they were too intimidated to take classes on campus but were eager to participate in on-site classes.

Communication and Networking


Sustaining a Neighborhood Networks consortium also requires regular communication with its members to keep them informed about news from the consortium members, other centers, and their local partners.

"Good communication has been key to the success of ANNC. It communicates regularly with its members through e-mail, monthly board conference calls, and quarterly general membership meetings," says Richey. "Quarterly membership meetings also give center staff time to talk with each other."



A well-designed Web site can keep members informed about consortium activities. It can also educate prospective members, including centers and local partners, about the consortium and its benefits.

Digital Promise created the Community Connection program to keep members involved and to share information on new software, government programs, and news from the consortium and other centers. This consortium also formed listservs to keep all of its members informed about organization news. Regular roundtable discussions bring centers together to share ideas and concerns and to hear guest speakers address topics of interest to center staff. Because most centers have limited time and travel budgets, Digital Promise is exploring new meeting formats, such as conference calls, virtual meetings, and online updates, to keep centers informed and connected.

For more information about Neighborhood Networks consortia, visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site (www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org), phone (888) 312-2743 (toll free) or (800) 483-2209 (TTY), or e-mail neighborhoodnetworks@hud.gov. 

Getting the Best START

The success of a Neighborhood Networks center is evident in the lives that change because of the organization's programs and service offerings. Increasingly, grantors and partners are asking if an organization has achieved its mission and what has resulted from the program or activity they helped fund. "Today, nonprofits have to think clearly about what results are for their organization," writes Peter F. Drucker in *Self-Assessment: The First Action Requirement of Leadership*.

For Neighborhood Networks centers, identifying the needs of local residents, managing day-to-day operations, and assessing the results of programs and activities can be daunting tasks. However, the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool (START), HUD's online business planning and assessment tool, is helping centers define their mission, identify their current and potential users and partners, set meaningful and achievable goals, and perform self-assessments of program and activity outcomes.

**Effective goals are specific,
measurable, aggressive,
relevant, and time-bound.**

Douglas K. Smith
*Better Than Plan:
Managing Beyond the Budget*

Missions and Customers

When centers begin the START process, they are asked to define their mission. To create an effective mission statement, Drucker suggests that organizations ask themselves the following questions:

- What is our mission?
- Who is our customer (center participant)?
- What does the customer (center participant) value?
- What are our results?
- What is our plan?

These questions are straightforward and answering them helps a center address the fundamental question of what its mission is and what it should be. Neighborhood Networks centers that take time to contemplate and then answer these questions will benefit from determining their organization's primary customer base and the needs of supporting agencies and individuals (such as volunteers, partners, and donors) that must be satisfied. By spending the time to address these questions, "You will engage in research to learn directly from customers what they value, decide what your results should be, and develop a plan with long-range goals and measurable objectives," adds Drucker.

Measurable Goals

After management determines a center's mission and defines the customers served, they should set measurable and meaningful goals to ensure that the center fulfills its mission. Rather than focusing on activity-based goals, management is encouraged to set outcome-based goals that describe the results or impacts that directly answer whether a center succeeds at achieving its mission. Outcome-based goals result from activity-based goals. For example, 10 students graduating from a general equivalency diploma program is the outcome of 10 people attending classes that a Neighborhood Networks center offers. "Effective goals are specific, measurable, aggressive, relevant, and time-bound," writes Douglas K. Smith in *Better Than Plan: Managing Beyond the Budget*. To track program success and the challenges that a center faces, performance measures and goals must be relevant to the challenges themselves.

In 1997 the McAuley Institute and the Development Leadership Network launched the Success Measures approach to program evaluation, a project to increase the capacity of community-based development organizations and the residents they serve and to better

analyze the results of their work. The project also sought to shift power dynamics in the community development field by encouraging local organizations to control and use evaluation and research skills effectively and by increasing the voice of practitioners and residents in determining and measuring priorities. Finally, the project attempts to demonstrate the value and impact of community development to a broad range of audiences, including the public.

Success Measures uses a participatory process for involving community residents, program participants, staff members, board members, and other stakeholders in documenting and analyzing outcomes of community development programs and activities.

Meaningful Outcomes

To truly measure and sustain success, Neighborhood Networks centers must focus on outcomes that are meaningful to center participants, not merely on activities. The goals that the center establishes need to excite and motivate staff, participants, volunteers, and grantors. Equally important, the center needs to evaluate its success in meeting its goals. Management should set appropriate performance goals that are:

- **Specific.** To be effective, performance goals must answer *what*, *whom*, and *how much*. For example, a center might offer 3 resume workshops for groups of 5 participants each, resulting in 15 individual high-quality resumes that will help participants find employment commensurate with their skills.
- **Measurable.** Effective goals are assessed by a combination of four measures:
 - Speed or time to achieve a desired outcome;
 - Cost of providing services or activities;
 - Quality or customer expectations; and
 - Positive impact for center participants, staff, or supporting agencies.
- **Aggressive.** Goals should challenge center staff and participants and inspire them to sustain their efforts. People need to feel confident that they can accomplish their goals.
- **Relevant.** Goals should pertain directly to a performance challenge the center faces. They should address participant needs, not organization processes. For example, the goal of participants is to obtain or retain a job, not simply to attend classes to learn necessary skills.



- **Time-bound.** Well-defined goals must include a timeframe for when they will be accomplished. This time period should be free of arbitrary constraints imposed by an organizational calendar. Computer training, for example, takes time, and goals should reflect the time needed.

For additional information about START, visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org or call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll free at (888) 312-2743 or TTY (800) 483-2209. 



Good Planning Can Promote Sustainability

Financing the startup and ongoing operations of a Neighborhood Networks center requires multiple funding sources and careful planning to ensure that all budget areas are covered. Centers across the country use local resources, national partners, and a variety of HUD incentives to develop and sustain community learning centers that address the needs of residents who are on a path to self-sufficiency. Funding center operations begins during the planning process and is refined during periodic reviews to ensure that salaries and operating costs are adequately covered.

Grant opportunities. National, regional, and local foundations, along with government agencies, provide a variety of funding sources that can support general operations, salaries, and specific activities to enhance the training and educational opportunities available to residents. One resource that center managers can use is *Grants.gov*, a centralized listing of all government grants and funding available to develop and sustain programs. The Neighborhood Networks Web site (www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org) lists funding opportunities of interest to centers. In the past these opportunities have included funding available from the Microsoft, Verizon, and Annie E. Casey Foundations, as well as regional funding opportunities in areas where corporations and nonprofits have a significant presence.

HUD funding options. Although Neighborhood Networks is not a grant program, HUD offers options to develop and operate centers. For example, the Mark-to-Market (M2M) program (created in 1997 to preserve affordable housing through debt restructuring) will finance 97 percent of the cost of new Neighborhood Networks centers, including constructing or renovating space, upgrading wiring to support a computer lab, and paying staff salaries. Equipment

(such as computers, tables, and chairs) is not considered an eligible M2M expense.

Additional HUD funding sources¹ available to center owners and managers include project funds or residual receipts accounts, borrowing from the reserve for replacement account, and requesting a rent increase. Local HUD multifamily project managers review and approve owners' requests.

Partnerships. To expand resources available to centers, HUD continues a national partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Education, Bank of America, American Association of Community Colleges, STRIVE, and CyberLearning. These partnerships enhance residents' access to key workforce development and education resources. Most centers also establish local partnerships (for example, with nonprofit groups, adult education agencies, and health departments) to provide onsite literacy and general equivalency diploma (GED) classes, afterschool programs, and other activities.


Center components. Drawing on 10 years of experience, William A. Miecuna, New York Neighborhood Networks Coordinator, recommends that the following key components be considered when designing a Neighborhood Networks center:

- **Accessibility costs.** Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act can be more expensive in older buildings.
- **Security for computer lab.** Some centers have installed alarm systems or security cameras and others hire a receptionist to monitor entry into the lab.
- **Separation of computer lab from other activities.** Successful centers typically have a computer lab and a separate space with tables and chairs for discussion groups, homework, and mentoring. A glass or soundproof wall should separate the two areas.
- **Computer stations within the lab.** Computer stations surrounded by partitions muffle sound and afford privacy, while at the same time allowing for user supervision.
- **Air conditioning.** Especially important in warmer climates, air conditioning will affect the required electrical service.

¹ Chapter 9 of HUD Handbook 4381.5, *The Management Agent Handbook*, describes HUD funding sources available to Neighborhood Networks centers.



- **Hardware costs.** Although it is possible to find used computers, it is better to have up-to-date identical computers that can be networked to a central server. Having identical computers will help prevent conflicts among those using computers at the center.

Fundraising is a time-consuming process that requires developing and fostering relationships within the community as well as exploring options with national foundations and federal agencies. An understanding of the available resources and the needs that they can fill is often the first step toward establishing a financing stream that will ensure center sustainability. 

NETWORKNEWS

Network News is published electronically by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of Multi-family Housing Programs. Additional copies may be downloaded at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. For more information about Neighborhood Networks, contact the Information Center toll free at (888) 312-2743.